

Stop distorting Jinnah's words

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It is a sad statement about Pakistan that 67 years after its founding, our education system and public culture continue to distort key ideas enunciated by Mohammad Ali Jinnah to govern the country. To make matters worse, even his words end up being mutilated.

In his landmark speech to the [first Constituent Assembly on August 11, 1947](#), Jinnah laid out what he saw as the principles for a future constitution for Pakistan. The speech tackled the relationship between religion and the state. This has proved to be more controversial than he could ever have imagined. It has been subjected to distortion and censorship over the years and his words are once again under attack.

In perhaps, the most significant part of his address to the Constituent Assembly Jinnah said:

“You are free; you are free to go to your temples, you are free to go to your mosques or to any other place of worship in this state of Pakistan. You may belong to any religion or caste or creed, that has nothing to do with the business of the state. ... We are starting with this fundamental principle that we are all citizens, and equal citizens, of one state.”

It is clear from [these words](#) that the Quaid saw Pakistan as a state in which there would be a separation between state and religion and that Pakistan would be a country in which people of all faiths are equal citizens. There was to be no distinction between a Muslim and a non-Muslim in terms of rights, privileges and responsibilities.

There was an attempt to censor and then suppress the Quaid's words from the very beginning. The August 11 speech was not discussed in public for decades. The founder's vision was rediscovered in the 1980s when it was used to resist General Ziaul Haq's attempt at turning Pakistan into a theocracy. Having failed to suppress Jinnah's statements, today the supporters of theocracy in Pakistan are trying to distort them. The new assault on the Quaid's vision is evident in the revised national curriculum of 2006. The [national curriculum](#) says one of the things teachers and textbooks must do is help children learn “the role of minorities in Pakistan with specific reference to Quaid-e-

Azam's speech of August 11, 1947, defining their status". By focusing on 'role' and 'status' of religious minorities, the national curriculum rightly points students to the issue of religious equality. However, it misses out completely on requiring children to understand Jinnah's statement in support of separating religion and state. This does a great disservice to Jinnah's vision of a proper relationship between religion, state and citizens.

The new curriculum opens the door for public school textbook writers to misinterpret the Quaid's vision and words. The words of his speech are being edited with abandon. In the English edition of the Pakistan Studies textbooks of Balochistan, his August 11 speech is reprinted in quotation marks as:

"You are free, whether you want to go to temples, mosques or other places of worship, you are absolutely free. Whatever your religion or caste may be, the affairs of the state shall not be affected. We are heading forward with the basic principle that we are equal citizens of one state. I believe we must adhere to this principle, and you shall see that that there would be no discrimination between the Hindus and the Muslims in terms of equal political rights."

It is amazing that such a mutilation of Jinnah's words can be printed in quotation marks. The reader may think at first sight that such a small change is not a big issue. But small changes can have long-lasting and important consequences. An entire generation of Pakistanis is familiar with the slogan "[Faith, Unity and Discipline](#)" that is attributed to Jinnah. This is, in fact, a distortion of his original words. The actual words of the Quaid were "Unity, Faith and Discipline" and were intended as a political slogan. The order was changed in the 1980s to give ideological support to the Islamist military dictatorship of General Zia. The change in order of the words was accompanied by a change in the meaning of the word 'faith'. In the original meaning, the word faith was meant as 'faith in oneself', or self-esteem. Hence, the Urdu translation of this word until 1980 was *Yaqeen-e-Mohkam* (a firm belief in oneself). Under General Zia, and ever since, 'faith' has been translated as '*iman*' (religious belief).

Can we, as a nation, be at least honest with the founder of the nation? People should be free to disagree with his words, but we should all know and agree on what his words were.

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